Military medical heroes of the Korean War

Office of the Assistant Secretary of War for Health Affairs/Military Health System
Story by Robert Hammer

Date: 07.24.2026
Posted: 07.24.2026 08:29
News ID: 570652

"This year, the Military Health System is celebrating 250 years of America by recognizing military medicine's enduring history of innovation and impact to the warfighter. Please join the Military Medicine 250 campaign!"

America recognizes National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day and the 73rd anniversary of the Korean War armistice July 27, honoring the nearly 1.8 million U.S. service members who served there and the 36,576 who died in the three-year fight.

The Korean War began June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and attacked South Korea. The United States military joined South Korean and allied troops in the war across the Korean Peninsula. The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953, ending major combat operations.

American military medics and corpsmen served on the front lines to care for thousands of wounded — some giving their lives to support the warfighters. Those who received the Medal of Honor represented selflessness and a dedication to care above and beyond the call of duty.

Korean War medical personnel who received the honor include Army Pfc. Bryant Homer Womack, who, despite being struck by enemy fire, "insisted that all efforts be made for the benefit of others that were wounded," the citation reads. Womack Army Medical Center is named in his honor.

Courageous warfighter medical personnel also include Army Pfc. Richard G. Wilson, https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/david-b-bleak, Navy Hospital Corpsman John E. Kilmer, https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/edward-clyde-ted-benfold, and Navy Hospitalman Francis C. Hammond — just five of the military medical personnel who received the Medal of Honor.

Army Pfc. Richard G. Wilson

Serving with Medical Company, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment, Wilson was on a reconnaissance-in-force mission through the hilly country when they were ambushed by enemy fire. He put himself in harm's way to aid the wounded, moving them to safety. As the company was ordered to withdraw, he rushed back out to save a comrade, unarmed and under attack by the enemy. Wilson was found beside the man he returned to aid, shot several times while trying to shield and administer aid to the wounded man, according to the citation.

Army Sgt. David B. Bleak

Bleak, born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, served with the Medical Company, 223d Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division. On June 14, 1952, near Minari-gol, Korea, he volunteered to join a reconnaissance patrol sent to capture an enemy prisoner for interrogation.

The patrol came under heavy fire and took casualties. Bleak moved the wounded out of harm's way and treated as many as he could. When enemy soldiers fired from a nearby trench, he entered the trench and killed two with his

bare hands, and a third with his knife. When he turned his attention back to the wounded, a grenade landed and he threw himself over a service member to shield him from the blast.

Though wounded, Bleak knew he still had to get the man back to safety. He carried the injured Soldier down a hill when two enemy soldiers charged him with bayonets. He "grabbed them and smacked their heads together" before getting the wounded soldier to safety.

Dwight D. Eisenhower presented Bleak the Medal of Honor at the White House Oct. 27, 1953. Bleak died March 23, 2006.

Navy Hospitalman Richard D. Dewert

Dewert served as a medical corpsman with 1st Marine Division in Korea, when his company went under enemy fire. Despite a painful leg wound, he rushed to aid the seriously wounded, bringing struck warfighters out of the line of fire. Dewert was mortally wounded by the attack. "By his courageous initiative, great personal valor, and heroic spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of overwhelming odds," his Medal of Honor citation states, "Hospitalman Dewert reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

Navy Master Chief Hospital Corpsman William Richard Charette

Also serving with the 1st Marine Division, Charette risked his life in action against enemy aggressor forces. He moved to render assistance to his wounded comrades, and when an enemy grenade landed within a few feet of a U.S. Marine he was treating — he threw himself upon the stricken man and absorbed the blast. Despite sustaining painful facial wounds and undergoing shock, he continued to administer medical aid to the wounded, even removing his own battle vest and placed it upon seriously wounded comrade whose armored vest had been torn from his body. As the only living the Medal of Honor recipient from Korea, his namesake ship, the USS William Charette, will be christened in August 2026.

Navy Hospital Corpsman John E. Kilmer

Kilmer joined the U.S. Navy Aug. 16, 1947, one day after his 17th birthday. Five years later, he was attached to a U.S. Marine rifle company in the 1st Marine Division in Korea during the war. In August 1952, Americans fought the legendary battle for Bunker Hill, also known as Hill 122.

During some intense barrage of mortar, artillery, and sniper fire, Kilmer moved from position to position to treat and evacuate wounded Marines. Even after being wounded by mortar fragments, he kept going.

Heading back to safety, Kilmer located a badly wounded U.S. Marine in the open, cut off from safety by enemy fire. Despite being told not to go after him by a superior officer, he crawled his way to the injured service member, provided aid, and used his own body to shield him from worsening gunfire. Kilmer was mortally wounded while protecting the wounded Marine, who survived.

The Medal of Honor was posthumously presented to his mother at the Pentagon July 8, 1953.

Navy Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Edward "Ted" Benfold

Born in Staten Island, New York, Benfold enlisted in the U.S. Navy June 27, 1949. He trained at the Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, and later as a neuropsychiatry technician at U.S. Naval Hospital, Philadelphia, before serving with the Marines in Korea.

He was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion,1st Marine Division. On Sept. 5, 1952, Chinese forces attacked Marine positions in the Bunker Hill area. Mortar and artillery fire hit the outpost before the enemy infantry moved in. Benfold jumped into action, treating wounded Marines under heavy fire. When the platoon area was attacked from the front and rear, he left his covered position and went to an exposed ridgeline. There he saw two wounded

U.S. Marines in a large shell crater, but before he could treat them — enemy soldiers threw two grenades and rushed forward.

Benfold picked up a grenade in each hand and charged the attackers, killing them and dying in the blast. The two Marines in the crater survived their injuries.

On July 16, 1953, the Medal of Honor was presented posthumously to his young son. In 1994, the U.S. Navy commissioned the guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold in his honor.

Navy Hospitalman Francis C. Hammond

From Alexandria, Virginia, Hammond enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1951. After recruit and field medical training, he deployed to Korea in February 1953 and served with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division.

On the night of March 26, 1953, near Sanae-dong, Korea, Hammond's platoon fought for a heavily contested outpost far ahead of the front lines, when mortar and artillery fire tore into them followed by an enemy assault.

Hammond was wounded but refused to back down. For about four hours, he moved among wounded Marines and treated those he could. When they were ordered to withdraw, Hammond moved the injured first. He then stayed behind to help corpsmen from the relieving unit care for other casualties. He was still helping the wounded when enemy mortar fire struck again.

Hammond was killed by shrapnel in the fight. His infant son was presented with his father's posthumously awarded Medal of Honor at the Pentagon Dec. 29, 1953.

In Korea, U.S. military medical personnel did not wait for the battle to stop before saving lives — they fought to move their fellow warfighters to safety and treat their injuries under attack. More than seven decades later, their stories live on as testament to their ultimate dedication and sacrifice.

Spotlight page recommendations:

1. Military Medicine 250
2. Military Health Medal of Honor Recipients

Recommended Content:

1. Womack's namesake honors Korean War Medal of Honor recipient, delivers state-of-the-art care today
2. From wagons to air ambulances: Medevac keeps the fight alive